

Creating a Family Spirit

One of life's greatest joys is to live in a close-knit family where the members think, feel, and act together as a family unit. Such families experience a sense of unity and togetherness.

In bygone ages, when society wasn't so complex and hurried, it seemed a lot easier to build that kind of family. Today, however, many families cope with four or five different work schedules, numerous extracurricular activities, and jam-packed social calendars of parents and children alike.

In families with complicated schedules many experience little unity or togetherness and instead know fragmentation, loneliness, and isolation. According to David Wilmes in his book "Parenting for Prevention—How to Raise a Child to Say No to Alcohol/Drugs," a family with little togetherness is more likely than other families to have children who have problems with alcohol and drugs.

Lacking a family spirit of love, togetherness, and mutual support, the kids look for it elsewhere, and far too often they find it in the false good fellowship and high feelings experienced amid the alcohol/drug crowd.

Is it possible, in a society as ours, to build a close-knit, united, loving family? How can this be done?

Establishing family rituals, traditions, and celebrations is a way to create a feeling of identity and belonging—of establishing a family culture. Family traditions can serve to develop that sense of connectedness, continuity, and stability.

What are your family traditions and celebrations? How do you communicate the importance of family time to your child(ren), nieces, nephews, siblings? It can be as simple as playing ball on a Sunday afternoon, going for walks or rides in the car with a relative, or playing a special game. Family celebrations do not need to require a large amount of time—or lots of prior planning. They can be spontaneous—and take as little as 15 minutes.

The following suggestions are actual quotes from Native American Youth workers on celebrating life and creating special family rituals that help bind us together:

Sunday or "Special" Days

- Enjoy family—visit, laugh, love...
- Big dinner with all the "fixings"—just to spend time together.
- Make Sunday dinner special with no TV and a nice dinner—no fast or boxed food. Then discuss and reflect on how our week went—it gives the

kids a chance to say whatever they feel, everyone listens and everyone gets a chance to talk.

- Eat pizza on every pay-day.
- Eat browned oatmeal and bacon in the morning for breakfast, then eat roast at night.
- Watch football.
- Saturdays are our "Special Family Days."

We usually all hang out together playing some sort of game—then make a big dinner. We like to make a fire out in the fire pit, sit around the fire, and share the "highs" and "lows" of our week. This helps to share ideas how to deal with life and changes.

Birthdays

- NO CHORES ON YOUR BIRTHDAY!

Also, birthday person gets to pick what's on the menu! YUM!

- Cake and ice cream—special dinner—gifts—verbal appreciation.
- String of balloons from bedroom to kitchen first thing in the morning—then have a big "I LOVE YOU" speech!
- Do whatever the birthday person wants to do on his/her special day.

"Girls/Guys Night Out"

Spend quality time together:

- Go out shopping, eating.
- Watch a movie together.
- Go to bingo or a movie, or have little pedicure and pampering parties.
- Spend time together doing just anything—have fun celebrating being "girls" (or guys).

Spur of the Moment Activities

- Cut hair
- BBQ
- Picnics.
- Walk to the park
- Mutual back rubs
- Story time
- Drop by Mom's house
- Games
- Go bowling
- Yard time

Wilmes, D. Parenting for Prevention, How to Raise a Child to Say No to Alcohol/Drugs, Johnson Institute Books, 1989.

